

# March 11, 2015 CDC Ebola Response Update

*[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Ellen Wan] Schools in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone that were closed for six months or more because of Ebola are starting to reopen. CDC, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization released key messages on safe school operations in these countries.

CDC's Eric Dziuban has been working on children's health issues during the Ebola response. Eric, tell us about why schools are reopening and what these key messages are for.

[Eric Dziuban] Well, we know that about five million students in these countries were out of school by the end of 2014 due to the Ebola outbreak. With the number of new cases declining, many schools have been allowed to reopen or will in the next few weeks.

We believe education offers children, their communities, and their countries a brighter and safer future. Reopening schools will help them get back to normal. It will also help fight the current outbreak by giving children a safe, healthy place to go. They'll also be able to share what they learn about staying safe with their family and friends.

Of course, keeping children and staff safe is the first priority in all these school systems. To help these countries get their schools operating safely again, we developed messages for school administrators, teachers and staff, parents, community members, and students.

The messages include basic facts on Ebola, how to protect yourself and others, how schools are keeping students and staff safe, and what to do if Ebola does show up in a school.

[Ellen Wan] What are some of the most important things to know?

[Eric Dziuban] There are a few basic principles we want everyone to know to stay safe and help stop the spread of Ebola.

First, if someone feels sick, don't go to school.

Second, we encourage everyone to wash their hands frequently, and schools should make daily disinfection of surfaces a priority.

Third, we want schools to discourage close contact, including touching and sharing items like food or utensils.

And finally, schools should follow national and local Ebola guidance, particularly if someone starts to feel sick with symptoms that look like Ebola.

[Ellen Wan] These messages aren't considered to be direct CDC guidance. What's the reason for that?

[Eric Dziuban] Well, we know reopening schools is not a "one size fits all" situation -- it can be very different depending on the country, the local community, and the school.

We thought it was important to offer a tool that each country's government could use to develop their own guidance. By focusing on the most important principles for reopening schools safely, we hope to avoid risks and remove barriers that would keep students out of the classroom any longer than they already have been.

[Ellen Wan] What challenges do you expect schools to face when reopening?

[Eric Dziuban] Many returning students and staff will have experienced severe trauma during the school closure.

There may be fewer teachers because some have changed jobs, relocated, or have died. Some school buildings were used for patient care during the outbreak, and communities and parents may be especially worried about children returning there.

It won't be easy for these schools, and the local educators are truly heroes for the work they're doing.

But we believe that the messages CDC has released with UNICEF and WHO are an important step in assisting with the challenges. Giving clear statements about how to respond to these topics can empower schools to become a place where the community sees healing occur and finds hope for the future.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.